

From the Editor

*However, other aspects of his argument remain compelling. The first is that theory needs to reflect on its own role in the process of societal reproduction. Traditional theory, he observed, was a function of the industrial system because it promoted a knowledge that made available the world as a place for human manipulation according to a means-end rationality. It was “a cog in an already existent mechanism” (Horkheimer, 1982: 216). Critical Theory, by contrast, aims to produce knowledge that transcends the societal conditions that produced its periodic crises. For those of us who study genocide, this is surely a pressing imperative. Is it not true, after all, that the liberal theory of genocide highlights specific phenomena but fails to illuminate the nature of the system that produces it? And don’t we want our findings to be linked intrinsically to the establishment of a world in which genocide has been banished? The concept of theory, Horkheimer urged, needs to move world society to a new state of development. The second, compelling dimension of Critical Theory is its holistic or dialectical approach, that is, its focus on “totality”: or—to use an analogy from economic theory—general equilibrium analysis rather than partial equilibrium analysis. In this respect, the Hegelian heritage retains its usefulness. The “true is the whole,” Hegel wrote in *The Phenomenology of the Spirit*, meaning for us that the individual instances of genocide we study cannot be understood other than as dialectically mediated moments of a global system. We need to study the entire system, in other words, not just its constituent parts. Horkheimer proposed that a critical theory not proceed, therefore, like traditional theory, which focuses on specific phenomena and tries to relate concepts to reality by way of hypotheses. Instead, Critical Theory proceeds historically by showing how the capitalist system functions and unfolds over time. It is not a storehouse of concepts and categories with which to interpret the course of events, then, but an internally integrated view that constructs a complete picture of a historically evolving global society as a whole.*